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A. S. WATSON & CO., LIMITED,
THE HONGKONG DISPENSARY,
Hongkong, 19th November, 1894.

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

Only communications relating to the new columns should be addressed to "The Editor." Correspondents are requested to forward their names and addresses with communications addressed to the Editor, not for publication, but as evidence of good faith.

All letters for publication should be written on one side of the paper only.

No anonymous signed communications that have appeared in other papers will be inserted.

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BIRTH.
At Amy, Thomson's Hotel, on the 15th inst., wife of Mr. A. S. Watson & Co., Limited.

The Daily Press.

HONGKONG, DECEMBER 25TH, 1894.

The debate in the Legislative Council on Saturday on the new Health Bill was one of the most important and interesting that has taken place in that assembly for many years.

The time has arrived when it is necessary to deal effectively with the conflicting interests of property owners and of the community generally, for it is imperative that every possible precaution should be taken against the return of the plague or against its obtaining a foothold and becoming epidemic.

should have been introduced from the mainland. In taking measures with that object it is impossible to avoid touching the interests of property owners.

The question then arises, to what extent if any should the landlords be compensated for the interference with their interests. Where the insanitary condition of houses is directly attributable to the default of the owners this question can only be answered in one way, namely, by declaring definitely that no compensation at all shall be given.

A mistake was unfortunately made in providing in the Taipingshan Resumption Ordinances for interest being paid to the owners of property in that district on the price at which the land was to be effected from the date of the closing of the houses to the date of the payment of the money.

This gave the unofficial members some ground for urging that the owners of houses outside that district which have been closed for longer or shorter periods should be compensated for the loss of rent.

They contended that all should be treated alike, and that the payment of interest to the Taipingshan owners was equivalent to compensation for loss of rent.

To this the answer is that too much has been given to the Taipingshan owners that is no reason why the owners of plague nuisances in other parts of the colony should be compensated because it has been decided that their houses must be placed in a sanitary condition.

There is probably not a landlord in the colony who would not be glad to have his property resumed on the terms of the Taipingshan Resumption Ordinance.

The plague has turned out an excellent thing for those fortunate individuals who owned property in that district, just as a fire is a fortunate thing for a man who has his property overinsured and succeeds in recovering the full amount.

It was unfortunate that such a mistake was made in the Taipingshan Ordinance, but that is no reason why the colony should go on improperly paying compensation.

The amount involved in the case of the houses mentioned in the schedules to the present Bill would probably be found on investigation to be comparatively small, but it is important as a matter of principle that the claim for compensation should not be admitted.

It may unfortunately happen that the colony may have a succession of visitations of the plague and that many houses

may have to be closed during the epidemics, in which case to pay compensation in respect of them all would be a severe strain on the finances of the colony. But more important than the mere financial question is the consideration that landlords should be made to understand that the duties of property owners on their own other than the mere reversion of rents and that if they allow their houses to fall into an insanitary condition it is at their own risk. If they are to be compensated at the expense of the public for the consequences of their own neglect what inducement would there be for them to keep their property in good order?

To pay such compensation would indeed be a direct incentive to neglect, for if landlords found that visitations of the plague profited their own pocket there would be at least some amongst them who would rather hope for such visitations than work for deliverance from them.

In this matter therefore, as well as in the other questions decided on Saturday, we think the public at large will thank the Government for having used the official platform to outvote the unofficial members.

There is one debatable clause in the Bill, however. We refer to the clause which it is proposed to regulate the height of buildings according to the width of the streets or lanes on which they abut. It is unquestionable that the height of buildings should be so regulated, but the question of how that policy is to be carried into effect is a very wide and difficult one and deserves much more mature consideration than has yet been given to it.

In the meantime a compromise has been arrived at which seems to satisfy the unofficial members of Council, but we think the most sensible course would have been to strike section 12 out of the Bill, as proposed by the Hon. R. R. BELLINGHAM, leaving the matter to be dealt with hereafter.

Not that we would by any means advocate its being shelved indefinitely, but it is out of place in the present Bill, which is supposed to deal with matters of urgency. The regulation of the height of buildings is not a matter of urgency. It will be many years before the section dealing with this matter can have any appreciable effect either in widening streets or reducing the height of buildings abutting upon them, and it would have been better if the Government, the parties interested, and the community at large had had more time to consider with due deliberation the difficult problem of how narrow streets are to be dealt with.

This matter stands on quite a different footing from that of the insanitary condition of houses generally. The duty devolving on a landlord to keep his house in a sweet and wholesome condition and not to allow it to be overcrowded is self-evident, but where narrow lanes have been permitted by the Government, to throw on the owners the expense of widening those lanes or of reducing the height of their houses seems to be imposing on them a burden which they cannot fairly be called upon to bear.

According to the figures mentioned by the Hon. C. P. CHATER on Saturday, to carry out the policy embodied in the section as it stood on the second reading of the Bill, would have cost the Government about £100,000.

The loss, it is true, would have been extended over a great number of years, for it is only when houses have to be rebuilt, either through having been burnt down, damaged by typhoons, or in consequence of natural decay, that it is proposed to compel the owners to set them back from the old frontage or to reduce their height.

According to the amendment adopted yesterday these particular lanes will not be materially interfered with by the Bill, though others in different parts of the Colony may be. But it is important that these lanes should be widened, the question suggests itself whether it is expedient to wait for the slow operation of the causes above mentioned. In large towns at home it is not an uncommon thing for the municipal authorities to decide on the widening of streets, and especially in London have large operations of this character been carried out. In such cases the usual course has been for the authorities to acquire by purchase the property affected and deal with it in accordance with the general plan decided upon. The loss probably has not been great; in many instances there has not been a profit, values being enhanced by the improvements when the operations have been carried out on a large scale by public authorities, but if this work were thrown on private owners acting individually as circumstances might render rebuilding necessary, the present loss would be considerable, and ultimately, when after the lapse of many years the scheme had been completed, values should become largely enhanced, as would no doubt be the case, it would be another generation of owners that would reap the benefit.

Instead, therefore, of dealing with the matter in the way proposed in the present Bill, by which no benefit will be felt for the next half century—for no owner would enter on rebuilding operations under such conditions as long as an old house would stand—it would be better to deal with it on broad grounds and as a question, sui generis. Under any circumstances the subject is out of place in the present Bill and would have been more appropriately dealt with in an amendment of the Building Ordinance.

The matter might advantageously form the subject of inquiry by a Commission, both as to the necessity of widening in respect of each lane individually and the means by which the improvement could best be carried into effect. The question has been sprung upon the Bill as read a first time, but in the draft submitted to the Sanitary Board, on the 17th inst., a section appeared providing that the height of houses on land hereafter bought from the Crown should be limited according to the width of the streets, the conditions with regard to existing property being much more liberal.

Mr. LEUNG pointed out that there was practically no Crown land remaining for sale in the city and suggested that the provision should be made applicable to all houses to be built and to the original owners of the land, whether it may be purchased, is still going on and

already passed into the hands of private owners or on land to be purchased from the Crown. This suggestion was adopted by the Board, practically without discussion, and without any representations being made as to its effect on property owners. The amendment was accepted by the Government apparently in the name of off-hand manner, but has been modified in deference to the opinion of the unofficial members of Council, neither at the hands of the Government, nor of the Sanitary Board, nor of the community at large has the subject received due consideration. The Health Bill generally is a matter of urgency, but this particular subject is not urgent and might have been left over until it had been more fully gone into. Anything in the nature of spoliation is to be deprecated, and the new born zeal for reform should not be allowed to run to that extreme. Where a man wantonly neglects his property and allows it to fall into such an insanitary condition as to become a danger to the public health we would not consider out and out confiscation too severe a penalty for his neglect, but where it is a question of carrying out a great municipal improvement and of altering conditions for which the present property owners are in no degree responsible, such as the widening of narrow lanes, due consideration should be given to the principles of equity.

There will be no issue of the Daily Press tomorrow.

Notations for the Hongkong Daily Press on Saturday next.

The M. M. steamer *Malat* left Saigon for Hongkong on Sunday midnight.

There were 1,970 visitors to the City Hall Museum last week, of whom 145 were Europeans.

A social gathering will be held in the reading room of the Sailors' Home this evening at 7 p.m.

Miss Elsie Aitch will appear at the City Hall tomorrow night in her wonderful serpentine dance.

The D. D. steamer *Longong*, from Hamburg, left Singapore for this port yesterday, and may be expected here on or about the 31st inst.

At St. Peter's Seminary the choir today there will be divine service with holy communion at 10 a.m. The Right Rev. Bishop Durand will preach. The offertory will be given to the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society.

We would remind our readers of the opening performance of D. Aro's Marionettes tomorrow evening. The temporary theatre which has been erected on the Recreation is tastefully decorated and the programme is no doubt of the highest quality. This popular show will be as well patronised as its former visit.

The Straits Times of the 13th inst. says:—To-morrow the Straits Fire Insurance Co. (in liquidation) pays a dividend of 35 per cent. 815 per share was paid a little time ago. As the shares were 250 each, this would dividend repay all the capital and probably there will be another few dollars yet to come.

Wong Tai Mai, aged 52 years, who was found dead in her room at the Shaukiang, on the morning of the 23rd, is thought to have been murdered for her money and jewelry. The police have given the matter considerable attention and have also offered \$100 for the apprehension of the guilty parties, but thus far their efforts have been fruitless. The investigation is that the offenders have escaped to the mainland.

Mr. Baugter gave another of his enjoyable organ recitals at the Cathedral yesterday afternoon. The instrument, although at times it gave evidence of the need of repair, was in better condition than it has been for some time. The programme was as usual characterised by the best of taste and the renderings of the numbers were of the highest quality. We regret to say that Mr. Baugter will find it convenient to give us as many of these musical treats as possible.

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